

## E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS

**British universities should reward teaching and administration excellence**JOANNA B. WILSON*The academic job description*

A British university academic has three duties: teaching, administration and research. Teaching and administration work loads are allotted to the individuals on what is generally perceived as a fair system. Those who are research active are given less of these duties. With set schedules, the time required for the teaching component cannot be compromised. Likewise, administrative duties invariably have deadlines and carry an inherent responsibility to others. So only one task can be compromised by insufficient work time and delayed -research.

*The promotion steps*

Glasgow University is probably representative of the older, long established British universities in its promotion system. The step from lecturer to senior lecturer is judged equally on merit in all three categories of the job description, teaching, administration and research. The next steps - to reader and often professor - are judged exclusively on the research component. Research activity is quantified by grant income, but primarily by publication quality and quantity output. But in a university, without the income no output is possible. In order to achieve the output of quality publications one must be internationally competitive (by definition). As teaching, administration and even in some case procuring funds may not be a feature of the best research institutions, in the university setting a 40 hour week is simply inadequate to become or remain internationally competitive in research. This has the knock on effect that if someone is unable or unwilling to work more than 40 hours per week, they are likely to become less research active, will be allotted more teaching and administration, and over time the tendency is to polarise research verses teaching and administration, with little possibility of advancement in the later pole.

*How this impacts women*

These criteria apply equally to everyone, but the impact of child rearing is the underlying issue for women. Most men in science with children have a partner who is at home or who works part time to accommodate the family needs - so there is no limit placed upon the working day. Most women in science have partners in full time work. So one partner will have their work hours dictated by child care and school hours.

Given the criteria for university promotion, any restriction of working hours restricts the research component. Any individual with a family where both parents work equal hours or a single parent with a family, stands less chance of advancement compared to others. In science this predominantly (but not exclusively) impacts women. It inevitably results in it being harder for women with families to advance their careers unless they are prepared to sacrifice the needs of the family to an extent that is not acceptable to most individuals. This being the case, women tend to remain in the lower echelons of academia or abandon the career altogether.

*What could be done?*

It seems peculiar that two components of the job description are not components of advancement, that excellence in these areas is not duly rewarded, an aspect that industry definitely tackles more effectively than academia. The upshot is that teaching and administration are viewed as necessary burdens and there is little incentive to excel other than individual pride. A simple solution of benefit to all and without introducing positive discrimination, an idea distasteful to most, would be to reward all aspects of

the job when done well. The historical concept that advancement to readership and beyond is a separate research track simply no longer applies and should be abandoned.

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